

## Off to the Ball by coneygoil

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**Summary:**

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## Off to the Ball

It was happening. Mike's whole body tingled at the thought of fulfilling his long-awaited promise to Eleven. They were finally attending the Hawkins Middle School Snow Ball. As El lay on the table clutching his hand, Mike trying to give her hope that they'd be okay and their future together was ahead of them, it all seemed like a lifetime had passed since that devastating night.

Mike checked his collar one last time, straightening the already orderly folds. He climbed the basement stairs feeling quite jittery. Just thinking of El and how beautiful she would look set his cheeks on fire. Only a couple months had passed since they official became an item, but Mike couldn't lie to himself (even if he had cover up his feelings for El around everyone else), he had been truly and madly in love with Eleven since the first week they'd met.

A soft gasp caught his attention as he ascended the top of the stairs, and his mom rushed over, eyes dampening. "You look so grown up," she stated the obvious mother saying, and proceeded to tamp down his wayward locks.

"Mom," Mike whined, gently side-stepping her grooming.

"I made this for you and El." Karen picked up a rectangular pan - a cake with the words, 'Congratulations on Your First School Dance' wrote in slanted letters on the top. Mike was just about modified at the sight. "You and your friends can come back here later and dig in."

He'd get teased mercilessly, but Mike knew the boys would probably devour the cake. So, he decided to do what every good son should do, "Thanks, mom."

Footsteps descended the stairs. Mike looked up to find Nancy smirking his way. Nancy, already filling in the role as older sister, had volunteered to help El get ready for the Snow Ball. She'd tugged El's hand up the stairs earlier, banishing Mike to the basement to get ready so he couldn't accidentally sneak a peek of his date before the big reveal.

“Wait for it,” Nancy sing-songed, patting his shoulder as she brushed by.

Mike gazed up to the top of the staircase, his chin dropping at the sight as the old cliché that everything in the room disappeared rang true. Adorned in a cobalt dress, stood El looking like the princess she was in Mike’s mind. Her tulle skirt fell to her calves, a sequin top with spaghetti straps making up the upper-half of the dress. She wore a matching blue headband atop her pretty curly hair. El met his gaze, her pink cheeks darkening at the way he looked at her.

Mike’s eyes followed her as she joined him. El’s lips curved into a coy smile. “Pretty?” she asked a hint toward the conversation they had so long ago under far different circumstances.

His cheeks burned, but he couldn’t deny the truth as he offered a small smile. “Really pretty.”

Something shifted behind them, and Mike was thrown back into reality. He glanced behind him to find his mom and Nancy watching them knowingly.

“Picture time!” Karen announced, pointing her Nikon at them. They smiled for the camera, blinking a few times to clear the spots from their vision.

Mike cleared his throat. “Ready?”

El slipped her hand in his. “Ready.”

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The evening was more than El could imagine. She’d danced until her feet were sore and her legs felt like jelly. Every one of her friends offered up their hand to her. She’d laughed at Dustin’s goofy hijinks, twirled until she was dizzy with Will, and followed Lucas’ lead as he mimicked disco. Even Max giggled with her for a couple fast songs.

The slow dance with Mike was the highlight of the evening. Whenever a slow song began to play, couples would awkwardly stand still in front of each other for an extended beat before hesitantly

moving toward one another. It was cute seeing the glow of Mike's cheeks as he reached for her waist; she closed in the gap and grasped his other hand.

She'd watched movies where people had slow danced. The couple would draw close and sway to the music. In one movie, the girl laid her head down on the guy's shoulder. El smiled as she held eye contact with Mike, his features calm and his eyes seemingly lost in hers. After a minute of swaying, El decided his shoulder was calling her name and she laid her cheek against Mike's shoulder, her forehead pressing into his neck.

Heat suddenly radiated from his skin, and it felt wonderful to her. Mike's arm slid farther along her waist, drawing her closer until they were nearly flushed. El closed her eyes. This was a dream. It had to be a dream, because nothing could ever feel so amazing. She didn't know such a feeling could exist. But it did and she was drowning in it.

All too soon, the song faded and an upbeat tune brought the unattached students back onto the floor. El reluctantly pulled away from Mike, but he didn't let go of her hand. He nodded toward the exit then led them out the doors.

The crisp cold air hit El's skin, her body shivering from top to bottom at the temperature change. It was downright cold outside and she wasn't wearing sleeves, her coat still at the check-in table. Thankfully, Mike noticed instantly. He tugged off his suit jacket, wrapping it around her shoulders.

"Thanks." El savored the warmth that enveloped her – *his* warmth.

They made their way to a bench nearby. El snuggled into Mike's side, and Mike wasted no time locking their fingers. "I hope you're enjoying the Snow Ball."

"Very much," El replied, squeezing his hand as extra reassurance.

A beat of silence fell over them. Mike fidgeted, rubbing his thumb along her thumb. El watched him and his cute, nervous build-up to whatever he wanted to say.

“El?”

El smiled. He finally worked up the courage. “Yes?”

“Do you remember when I explained to you what love is?”

She nodded, remembering the detailed conversation they had on the subject of *love*. El had heard the term used by many people around her and on several movies. Her curiosity finally brought her to question why people used the word. There were different forms of love, and Mike had explained them as best he could.

“Remember the love between two people that liked each other as more than friends?”

She nodded again.

Mike breathed in deep then met her expectant gaze. “I think I love you like that.”

Though El didn’t understand the total depth of the statement, her heart beat against her chest in a way that she’d never felt before. Mike was the only one she’d ever felt this way for. “I think I love you like that too, Mike.”

In that moment, his face glowed with such joy that El couldn’t help the radiant smile that spread over her face. They leaned into each other, their lips meeting in a sweet kiss.

The door nearest to them pushed open, ending the wonderful moment between them. “Hey, you guys!” Dustin called, “Get back in here for the last dance before they shut everything down!”

El laughed as she pulled Mike up with her and tugged him back into the gym. Their first Snow Ball was now one of her most cherished memories so far, and there’d be many more to come.